Multiple Perfects in Scottish Gaelic  
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In this paper, I argue for ‘perfect’ as a type of aspectual semantics which can have multiple instantiations. Specifically, I investigate the claim in Iatridou, et al. (2001) that the interval between event time (ET) and reference time (RT) does not have “a distinguished status” in the perfect. I argue that not only do languages pay attention to this interval, but that some, including Scottish Gaelic (Gaelic), grammaticalize information about it.

Verbs in Gaelic can appear with one of several aspectual particles; two of these, air and as dèidh, seem to convey perfect semantics (VN is the ‘verbal noun’, or participial, form):

(1) Bha/tha/bidith mi **air** litir a sgorbhadh.  
\text{be:PAST/PRES/FUT 1S AIR letter TRAN write:VN}  
‘I had/have/will have written a letter.’

(2) Bha/tha/bidith mi **as dèidh** litir a sgorbhadh.  
\text{be:PAST/PRES/FUT 1S AS DÈIDH letter TRAN write:VN}  
‘I had/have/will have (just/recently) written a letter.’

A third particle, gu, conveys something like English ‘about to’:

(3) Bha/tha/bidith mi **gu** litir a sgorbhadh.  
\text{be:PAST/PRES/FUT 1S GU letter TRAN write:VN}  
‘I was/am/will be about to write a letter.’

I provide an analysis of perfect in Gaelic as a second type of grammatical aspect (in the spirit of Smith (1997), Iatridou, et al. (2001), and Pancheva & von Stechow (2004)). However, I do not locate a PerfectP above AspectP; instead I argue that these particles are realizations of an Aspect operator of type \text{<<vt>,<it>>}. Pancheva & von Stechow argue that the Perfect head introduces a ‘perfect time span’ (PTS, as introduced by Iatridou et al.), whose left bound is set by an adverbial like ‘since’. I claim that the PTS is secondary in importance to the relation between ET and RT, and that it is this relation, rather than the PTS, that is introduced by the Aspect head.

I analyze air as the primary retrospective perfect particle in Gaelic. Sentences with air pass tests for ‘Current Relevance’ (McCoard 1978): (4) below, but not the perfective equivalent, is consistent with John’s still living in Glasgow. These sentences also pass tests with past positional adverbials ((5)).

(4) Tha Iain **air** fuireach ann a Glaschu airson tri bliaghana.  
\text{be:PRES John AIR wait/stay:VN in Glasgow for three year:P}  
‘John has lived in Glasgow for three years.’

(5) Tha Iain **air** ithe an-diugh/#an-dè.  
\text{be:PRES John AIR eat:VN today/yesterday}  
‘John has eaten today/#yesterday.’

In addition, and contra the data in Ramchand (1993), the data I present indicate a perfect which has universal ((4)), experiential, and resultative readings.

Sentences with **as dèidh** have a similar but crucially non-identical distribution to those with **air**. I analyze
as dèidh as a near-retrospective perfect particle. While sentences with as dèidh follow adverbial patterns similar to those with air (as in (5)), I claim that as dèidh further requires ET to be close to the RT. The particle is not selecting for a short PTS: so long as the ET-RT interval is short, felicitousness results with a long PTS ((6)).

(6) Am bheil thu riamh as dèidh an doras a dhùnadh agus ghabh thu beachd nach robh na h-iuchraichean agad?

‘Have you ever (recently-)closed the door and realized you didn’t have your keys?’

In (7) I give the formula for air; t is a reference time, and τ represents the output of a runtime formula.

(7) \( [\text{AIR}] = \lambda P(v_t), \lambda t(i) [\tau(e) < t & P(e)] \)

\( (\tau(e) < t \text{ iff there is no } t' \subset \tau(e), \text{ s.t. } t' > t) \)

The runtime of the event precedes or partially overlaps with RT. Existential closure of the event and of RT take place at the sentence level.

For as dèidh, we must specify that the ET-RT interval is short. I borrow ε from the calculus to denote an ‘arbitrarily small quantity’; the value of the ET-RT interval must be less than this.

(8) \( [\text{AS DÈIDH}] = \lambda P(v_t), \lambda t(i) [\tau(e) < t & P(e) & \exists \varepsilon(N)[0 < |t-\tau(e)| < \varepsilon]] \)

\( (\tau(e) < t \text{ iff there is no } t' \subset \tau(e), \text{ s.t. } t' > t) \)

I analyze gu as a prospective perfect particle, establishing ET in a subsequence relation with RT. Additionally, I argue that gu (like as dèidh) requires that ET be close to the RT.

(9) \( [\text{GU}] = \lambda P(v_t), \lambda t(i) [t < \tau(e) & P(e) & \exists \varepsilon(N)[0 < |t-\tau(e)| < \varepsilon]] \)

\( (t < \tau(e) \text{ iff there is no } t' \subset \tau(e), \text{ s.t. } t' < t) \)

Here, the RT fully precedes (<) the runtime of the event.

In this conception of the perfect, the ET-RT span is the important one. Gaelic has two perfects which restrict this span. With perfect-type aspects, Asp introduces a precedence relation between these times, and some instantiations of Asp also set restrictions on the interval.

References